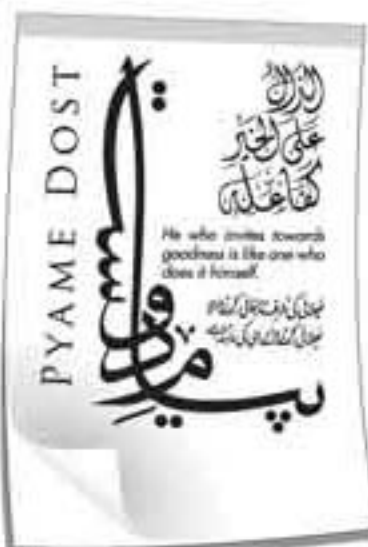




READ AND LET OTHERS READ

Ramadan

(the season of virtue & Piety)

In the Light of
Quran & Sunnah

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

We are alive at this moment and may die the next and death is the only certainty in our lives. In the same way that this life is not eternal, our death too will not be eternal. One day, body and soul, we will be standing in another world and on that day, the last court will be in session. Our Record of Deeds will be opened and our deeds will determine whether our final abode will be Paradise or Allah forbid, Hell. Whilst every one of us wants to be saved on that day from the torturous and humiliating punishment of Hell and is desirous of success in the Hereafter, we need to remember that there is only one way to achieve this and that is the way of taqwa-Allah consciousness.

Allah tells us in the Quran:

"But best for the righteous is the home in the Hereafter." (7:169)

We should adopt all the possible ways and means to remain steadfast on this path and fasting is the most effective way to achieve our objective. Allah tells us:

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may (learn) self-restraint." (Quran 2:183)

It is for this reason that our Lord has made fasting in Ramadan obligatory for us. This month serves as a special reminder that we must live life as a muttaqis-virtuous and Allah-conscious individuals and that all our emotions and actions must be subordinated to Allah's commands.

The Importance and Blessings of Ramadan

The Prophet (SAW) said:

"When the first night of Ramadan comes, the devils and the rebellious jinn are chained, the gates of Hell are locked and not one of them is opened; the gates of Paradise are opened and not one of them is locked; and a crier calls, 'You who desire what is good, come forward, and you who desire evil, refrain.' Some are freed from Hell by Allah, and that happens every night." (Tirmidhi)

"Paradise has eight gates, and one of them is called Ar-Raiyan through which none will enter but those who observe fasting." (Bukhari)

"Whoever breaks his fast during Ramadan without having one of the excuses that Allah would excuse him for, then even a perpetual fast, if he were to fast it, would not make up for that day." (Tirmidhi)

Connection with Allah

By nature a person's spirit inclines towards Allah, but the desires and lusts of the self affect its natural inclination. By curbing the base desires of the self, fasting nurtures the spirit and helps it to grow according to its natural inclinations. As a result of this, a person disconnects himself from the world and busies himself in seeking Allah's goodwill. It is for this reason that Allah has reserved special rewards for it. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Allah says: 'All the deeds of Adam's sons (people) are for them, except fasting which is for Me, and I will give the reward for it.' Fasting is a shield or protection from the fire and from committing sins." (Bukhari)

"There are two pleasures for the fasting person, one at the time of breaking his fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord; then he will be pleased because of his fasting." (Bukhari)

"By the One in Whose hand my soul is, the smell of the breath of a person fasting is better with Allah than the scent of musk. Allah says: 'He leaves his desires and his food and drink for My sake. Fasting is for Me and I reward it. Every good action is rewarded by ten times its kind, up to seven hundred times, except fasting, which is for Me, and I reward it.'" (Muwatta)

Training in Gratitude

Fasting trains a person in two things at the same time; one is gratitude and the other is taqwa. Food and drink is a person's greatest need. When a person's throat dries up with thirst and he feels faint from hunger, he realizes just how helpless he is and how utterly dependent he is on Allah for help. This experience serves as a reminder of Allah's superiority and man's own limitations in contrast. This is the very goal of taqwa. When a person breaks his fast at sunset he is reminded of how

completely his Lord has provided for his needs and overcome by his feelings of gratitude, his tongue utters words of praise and thanks. He realises that even if he were to surrender his entire life to his Lord Who has bestowed so many blessings upon him, he cannot adequately repay Him for what is owed to Him. This gratitude makes a person incline towards obedience to his Lord.

Closing the Doors of Fitnah (temptation)

The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Whoever guarantees me (the chastity of) what is between his legs (i.e. his private parts), and what is between his jaws (i.e., his tongue), I guarantee him Paradise."
(Bukhari)

Satan attacks the most from these very ways and fasting helps in curbing the temptations of these two parts of the body.

Training in Self-discipline

For an entire month in Ramadan a person trains himself to curb even his permissible needs in order to please his Lord and Creator. This yearly exercise makes him more and more proficient at pleasing His Lord rather than indulging his desires and emotions. In this way, he releases himself from the bondage to his feelings and fancies and becomes subservient to his Lord.

This very bondage is the forerunner of eternal sovereignty in Paradise.

Your Share

Although the importance and blessings of this month are undoubtedly great, it does not mean that its blessings will be the good fortune of every person who lives through it. Only if you work hard like a farmer, will the harvest of your rewards be ready for reaping in Paradise. The harder you work, the better the harvest. If the hearts become insensitive and you continue to sleep like a heedless farmer, the blessings of the fasts and taraweeh (Ramadan night-prayer) will flow away like rainwater and you will not gain anything. Let it not happen that Ramadan slips away and despite all its blessings and bounties, you are so unfortunate that you have gained nothing! To reap your share of the blessings of Ramadan, prepare yourself well.

Come let us see how we can prepare for Ramadan and the deeds that we must do in it and those acts that we need to refrain from.

Preparing for Ramadan

Supplication: Before Ramadan even begins, start supplicating to Allah after your prayers, in all your waking moments and if possible, offer the Salaat-ul-Haajah (prayer for fulfillment of need) that Allah should bestow upon you the guidance and the ability to derive maximum benefits from this Ramadan. Make this supplication keeping in mind what Angel Jibriel (AS) told the Prophet (SAW) when he came to him.

"Let the nose of that person be smeared with dust who has the opportunity to see the month of Ramadan and it comes to an end without his securing pardon for himself." (Tirmidhi)

Completing Your Shopping: Make all possible purchases for Ramadan and Eid beforehand, otherwise you will lose out on the blessings of such valuable nights as Laylatul Qadr and the night before Eid by busying yourself in shopping at these times. If one has no choice but to go to the market in Ramadan, try to spend as little time in it as possible. One should always be anxious and supplicate to Allah that all ones worldly duties should be performed in the minimum time so that more time can be devoted to Allah's remembrance and recitation of the Quran.

Completing the Round of Visits: There are many people that you need to visit only once a month and try to get this done before Ramadan.

Performing the Overdue Obligatory Duties: If there are any obligatory duties owed to Allah that have yet to be performed for e.g. zakah (obligatory alms) has to be given, compensatory fasts to be observed, then do them before Ramadan starts. Similarly, as regards the rights of people, if you have usurped someone's rights or been unjust to them, then right the wrong

done and ask for forgiveness. If you do not have the courage to ask for forgiveness in person, then at least write them a letter, telling them that to benefit fully from the blessings of the month of Ramadan, you need to mutually forgive each other. Be so good to those you have wronged that they should become pleased with you. Forgive those who have wronged you so that Allah may forgive you.

Sincere Repentance: Remember that sins prevent you from forming a strong connection with Allah, so with a feeling of great remorse, approach Allah. Beg Him to forgive you for all the sins of the eyes, tongue, ears etc. that you have committed resolving at the same time to not commit them again.

Distancing Yourself from the Source of Temptation: Stay away from all those friends, gatherings and activities which may result in your being led astray. Make a special effort to stay away from those things which you know are your particular weak areas.

Selecting the Mosque for Taraweeh Prayers: Search for a mosque where the Quran is recited in a proper, well paced and correct manner in the Taraweeh prayers.

Memorising the Quran and Different Supplications: Every Muslim should memorise at least as much of the Quran as is necessary to enable him to observe a long qiyaam (standing posture) in the nafal (voluntary) prayers in the nights of Ramadan. One should also learn the meaning of the recitation used in the prayers as well as the Quranic and Masnoon (prescribed) supplications. The Prophet (SAW) used to use a variety of additional adhkar in the qiyaam (standing), ruku (bowing), qauma (standing after bowing), sujood (prostration) and jalsa (between prostrations); so try to learn these with their correct pronunciation.

Ramadan Chart: Prepare a Ramadan checklist and make different columns for various areas and activities. Include in this your shortcomings and the bad habits that you wish to eliminate and the good ones that you want to acquire. Write in it how much Quran, Ahadith and adhkar you intend to read daily as well as any other activities you want to do. Fill this on a daily basis and do self-accountability.

The Things to be Done in Ramadan

Correcting One's Intention: Fast with the sole purpose of seeking reward in the Hereafter. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Whoever fasts to show off has done shirk." (Ahmad)

Zeal in Performing Prayers: We should make our prayers the most important part of our routine and be determined to perform it well. Men should make it a habit of praying in congregation, being present in the mosque from the first takbir and resolve to not miss any prayer and to pray it in congregation. Women should also try to pray at the earliest time.

Spending in Allah's Cause: The Prophet (SAW) was the most generous of all the people and in Ramadan, he used to become more generous than the fast wind. (Bukhari)

The Commands for Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) and Iftar: The Prophet (SAW) said:

☞ *"The pre-dawn meal is blessed, so do not neglect it even if you only take a sip of water. Verily, Allah and the angels pray for those who have pre-dawn meals."*
(Ahmad)

☞ *"My nation will always retain some goodness as long as they hasten breaking the fast and delay eating the pre-dawn meal."* (Ahmad)

The Supplication of Iftar:

ذَهَبَ الظَّمْأُ وَابْتَلَّتِ الْعُرُوقُ وَنَبَتَ الزُّجْرُ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ.

"Thirst has gone, the arteries are moist, and the reward is sure, if Allah wills."

(Abu Dawood)

Umrah: The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Perform Umrah in the month of Ramadan, as it is equivalent to Hajj or Hajj with me (in reward)." (Bukhari)

Benefitting from the Important Times: Both men and women should wake up at least 15-30 minutes before their appointed time for Suhur, as it is the time for Tahajjud (late night prayer) and Allah's mercy and attentiveness to petitions is at its peak. Perform nafal (voluntary) prayers, recite adhkar, beg Allah for forgiveness and supplicate fervently for good in this world and the next. Similarly, try to make all the preparations for Iftar in advance of the last 10 to 15 minutes before breaking the fast so that you can benefit from these extremely precious moments. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"A fasting person, upon breaking his fast, has a supplication that will not be rejected." (Ibn e Majah)

Refraining from Sins: The Prophet (SAW) said:

☞ *"Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink (i.e. Allah will not accept his fasting)." (Bukhari)*

☞ *"Fasting is a shield (or a screen or a shelter). So, the person observing fasting should not behave foolishly and impudently, and if somebody fights with him or abuses him, he should tell him twice, 'I am fasting.'" (Bukhari)*

Planning for the Forthcoming Year: Ramadan is the time for introspection, self-accountability and resolutions. Plan the activities that you need to do between this Ramadan and the next, the activities you need to eliminate from your life; how much religious knowledge you should acquire and propagate; the qualities that you need to cultivate and nurture and the shortcomings that you need to eliminate, the special goals you need to achieve with regard to your children's education and upbringing. All these should be planned in Ramadan, as plans made in this month of blessings will have Allah's special help and support.

Searching for Opportunities for Good Deeds: To be in search of opportunities to participate in good works should be an integral part of a believer's nature. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"A great month, a blessed month, a month containing a night which is better than a thousand months has approached you people. Allah has appointed the observance of fasting during it as an obligatory duty, and the passing of its night in prayer as a voluntary practice. If someone draws near to Allah during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfils an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfils seventy obligatory duties in another month. It is the month of endurance and the reward of endurance is Paradise. It is the month of sharing with others, and a month in which the believer's provision is increased. If someone gives one who has been fasting something with which to break his fast it will provide forgiveness of his sins and save him from Hell, and he will have a reward equal to his without his reward being diminished in any respect." The Companions (RAA) remarked to Allah's Messenger (SAW) that, "not all of us have the means to give one who had been fasting something with which to break his fast". He replied, "Allah gives this reward to him who gives one who has been fasting some milk mixed with water, or a date, or a drink of water with which to break his fast. Anyone who gives a full meal to one who has been fasting will be given a drink from my tank (Hawd) by Allah and will not thirst till he enters Paradise. It is a month whose beginning is mercy, whose middle is forgiveness, and whose end is freedom from Hell. If anyone makes things easy for his slave during it, Allah will forgive him and free him from Hell." (Bayhaqi)

In addition to worshipping the Creator being reward-worthy, good treatment to His creation is also a source of great rewards. As soon as Ramadan would start, a kind and virtuous lady would start stitching clothes free of charge for the less-privileged people in her neighbourhood and these women and their children would sit there happily watching their clothes being stitched. In this way, throughout the entire Ramadan, she continued to be a source of their happiness and the recipient of their sincerest and heart-felt supplications. In Ramadan, every person can find his own most effective ways of earning rewards according to his abilities and resources. The wealthy should focus on fulfilling the

needs of the needy, those who are not so well off but have religious knowledge can focus on imparting it to others. As for those who do not have even this but have sound health, they can offer to do some manual work for others and try to earn as much reward as they can.

Moderation in Eating: The real purpose of fasting is to restrain one's physical needs but some people make it a month of indulging in gastronomic delights. The right attitude is that eating and drinking should not become the purpose of fasting nor should special efforts be made for this end. Rather than spending extravagantly on food, the affluent should use this money to feed and help the less-privileged.

The Connection Between Fasting and the Quran: Allah chose the month of Ramadan for the revelation of the Quran and to enable us to show our gratitude for this great blessing, He made fasting obligatory for us for the whole month. So one should recite the Quran day and night in this month. The Prophet (SAW) said:

☞ *"Whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven." (Bukhari)*

☞ *"The fast and the Quran are two intercessors for the servant of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. The fast will say: 'O Lord, I prevented him from his food and desires during the day. Let me intercede for him.' The Quran will say: 'I prevented him from sleeping at night. Let me intercede for him.' And their intercession will be accepted." (Ahmad)*

This means that the nights of Ramadan or their major part should be spent with the Quran. The purpose of fasting is the acquisition of taqwa (Allah-consciousness) and Allah has said about the Quran that it is a guide for the muttaqqin (the Allah-conscious). So try to cultivate taqwa from fasting and at night let the Quran penetrate your heart and mind and permeate your whole being, so that your spirit will be nourished by it. However, remember that the Prophet (SAW) said:

"Perhaps a fasting person will get nothing from his fast save hunger, and perhaps the one who stands to pray at night will get nothing from his standing except sleeplessness." (Ibn e Majah)

Inviting to the Quran: All the blessings of this world will terminate with our last breath, but the only thing that will convert these perishable moments into an unending life and these transient pleasures into an eternal blessing is only the blessing of the Quran. The best well-wisher one can be for another and the most excellent service one can render him is to save him from Allah's wrath and the Fire and facilitate his entry to Paradise. The hunger and thirst of this world will terminate with this worldly life; every grief of this world will pass away, but the hunger and thirst of a bad outcome in the Hereafter is perpetual and its grief and sorrow is eternal. There, the food of thorns and the drink of blood, pus and scalding water will be the fate of the unfortunate. So it is important for you to resolve and supplicate that in Ramadan and even after it is over, a part your life, wealth and time will be dedicated to learning and teaching the Quran.

The Last Ten Days of Ramadan

In the same way that Ramadan is superior to other months, the last third part of Ramadan is superior to the first two parts.

☞ *"The Prophet (SAW) would strive [to do acts of worship] during the last ten days of Ramadan more than he would at any other time." (Muslim)*

One of the reasons for its importance is that it includes Laylat-ul Qadr. The reasons for the importance of Laylat-ul Qadr are given below:

The Revelation of the Quran: The Quran was sent down on Laylat-ul Qadr. Allah tells us in Quran:

"We sent it down during a blessed night." (44:3)

Pre ordainment and Distribution of Worldly Affairs:

The Quran has termed this night as the night of decisions. Allah tells us:

"In that (night) is made distinct every affair of wisdom." (44:4)

Who can assess the importance of this night in which the divine program for the universe and decisions regarding the creation are made?

"Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission on every errand." (97:4)

The Night of Peace, Blessings and Abundance: In Surah Al-Qadr the excellence of this night has been explained from two aspects; that *"this Night is better than a thousand months"* and: *"Peace it is until the emergence of dawn."*

Establishment of Laylatul Qadr: The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Search for the Night of Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan." (Bukhari)

Arrangements for Worship: This is not an ordinary night to be wasted in sleeping. The blessings, reward and closeness to Allah to be gained from it cannot be achieved in thousands of nights put together. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Whoever establishes the prayers on the night of Qadr out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allah's rewards (not to show off) then all his past sins will be forgiven." (Bukhari)

So no one should be careless in searching for this night. You should stand in prayer, do recitation of the Quran and Dhikr (remembrance of Allah), supplication and seek forgiveness during the major parts of all the odd nights of the last third of Ramadan. Be sure to stay awake from at least the middle of the night till suhur. Use an authentic book of Quranic and Masnoon (prescribed) supplications so that you are not deprived of asking for any possible goodness and supplicate to Allah from it, weeping and humbly imploring Him to grant your request. During your worship remember the Prophet's (SAW) words:

"He who is deprived of it (Laylatul Qadr) is deprived of all good, but only those who are denied prosperity are deprived of it." (Ibn e Majah)

The Special Supplication of Laylat-ul-Qadr:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنَّكَ عَفُوٌّ كَرِيْمٌ تُحِبُّ الْعَفْوَ فَاعْفُ عَنِّيْ (ترمذی)

"O Allah, You are Most Forgiving and You love forgiveness, so do forgive me." (Tirmidhi)

The Last Night of Ramadan

When the Prophet (SAW) stated that his people would be granted forgiveness on the last night in Ramadan and was asked whether it was Laylat al-Qadr, he replied, *"No, but a workman is paid his full wages only when he has finished his work." (Ahmad)*

I'tikaf - Private Devotional Worship

The real purpose of fasting is to direct the attention of the heart, mind, body and spirit towards Allah and both I'tikaf and fasting achieve this purpose. However I'tikaf is not obligatory like fasting. This training of a few days in seclusion is meant to leave such an impact, that despite the attractions of the world around him, a person's bond with Allah becomes so strong that he is able to save himself from disobedience to Allah and seek peace of mind and spirit through obedience to Him.

☞ The Prophet (SAW) used to engage in I'tikaf in the mosque during the last ten nights of Ramadan till Allah took him and then his wives followed this practice after his death. (Bukhari & Muslim)

☞ The Prophet (SAW) said about one who observes a period of I'tikaf in a mosque: *"He turns away from sins and he is rewarded for good deeds like one who does all good deeds." (Ibn e Majah)*

The mu'takif should spend all his time in voluntary prayer, recite the Quran, dhikr (Allah's remembrances), send blessings on the Prophet (SAW) and study the ahadith and books of the religious sciences. If he gets tired in one activity he should busy himself in another and not talk without purpose. He should partake

of a simple and light diet so that he can worship single-mindedly.

After Ramadan

☞ A believer observes two kinds of fasts; one is transient and the other is perpetual. The transient fast is in Ramadan and the perpetual one lasts from the age of understanding till death. Allah tells us in the Quran:

"And serve your Lord until there come unto you the Hour that is certain." (15:99)

How strange it is that we should be so regular and serious about the transient one and treat the perpetual one like a sport.

☞ The biggest gift of Ramadan is the Quran and Ramadan departs after reminding us of this blessing, so reading and reflecting upon it should continue for the rest of the year.

☞ Every month we should observe some voluntary fasts so that for the remaining 11 months there is continuity in the training in self-restraint undergone in Ramadan. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Indeed, anyone who fasts for one day for Allah's pleasure, Allah will keep his face away from the (Hell) fire for (a distance covered by a journey of) seventy years." (Bukhari)

☞ Ramadan is a month of sharing and showing compassion & sympathy for the less-privileged. Unemployment & inflation has considerably increased the numbers of those who are needy but do not openly ask others for help. Do stay in touch with these brothers & sisters even after Ramadan.

LASTLY

The journey of life passes by very fast. Along the way, one has to deal with Satan's continuous plots and attacks, the desires, whims and fancies of the soul that make it restless, the compelling temptations to sin, the persuasive arguments of those who invite us to it and an environment which makes one non-serious and heedless to the Hereafter.

To enable us to be steadfast and combat these deadly forces and continue on one's journey of life protecting ourselves from this onslaught of evil, Allah has created resting places along the way. On reaching them we can refresh ourselves and continue re-energized for the difficult journey ahead. So Ramadan is again approaching and bringing with it the opportunity for us to strive and work hard in this month so that we can arm ourselves to withstand the temptations of Satan and our own selves and to subdue our vain desires. The rigorous training in self discipline through worship in the nights and days of Ramadan, will, In Sha Allah, enable us to develop such fear and love of Allah that will uplift us spiritually and such strength of will and character that we will be able to traverse the remaining journey of life with ease. If on the other hand, Allah-forbid, we waste this precious time and are not able to achieve any of this then just imagine our plight and pitiable state. Just imagine our helplessness and innumerable difficulties in the face of the destructive attacks by Satan's forces and our own self, a cunning and formidable enemy. We cannot traverse this difficult journey without protection, nor can we reap the promised rewards if we miss the opportunities made available to us in Ramadan. It will come again after a whole 11 months and we cannot be certain how many of us will live to see it next year. There are no guarantees in life and we may be deprived of its blessings forever.

To be congratulated are those intelligent people who derive full benefit from this opportunity of strengthening their relationship with Allah, reviving themselves spiritually and emotionally and through fasting attain the unimaginable strength of taqwa to enable them to continue the challenging journey of life with courage and determination. In Sha Allah, Paradise awaits such as these.

May Allah bestow upon us guidance & the ability to fast in Ramadan observing all its etiquettes & to fully benefit from the excellence of this month. Ameen.



PYAME DOST House # ZB-1037/C, Sector 3,
Khayaban -e- Sir Syed, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
Website: www.pyamedost.org
E-mail: pyamedost@hotmail.com

